

Testimony for Appropriations Committee
In support of continued funding for
The Children's Law Center of CT, Inc.

Submitted by: Justine Rakich-Kelly
Executive Director

Good evening. My name is Justine Rakich-Kelly and I am the executive director of the Children's Law Center of CT. We are more commonly known as CLC.

I come before you this evening to request restoration of our \$150,000 line item in the state budget. We are currently under contract for a three year term housed under the umbrella of the Children's Trust Fund in the DSS budget. Unfortunately, our funding has been eliminated in the Governor's proposed budget.

I am not going to spend my 3 minutes telling you about how much we do for the children of Connecticut. Every agency that comes before you tonight will have a compelling story to tell and we do too. What I do want to tell you is how our programs impact you, the State of Connecticut and helps to make the systems of the State more efficient.

CLC has three major programs:

1. Representation – in which attorneys, in consultation with a mental health professional, represent the best interests of children in family court;
2. Lawline - a free legal resource for people with questions and concerns about the legal rights of children; and
3. Families In Transition – a low cost mediation and parenting education program designed to redirect high conflict cases out of the court system and into a collaborative process for resolving the disputes.

CLC's programs are designed to foster efficiency in the family court system and provide alternative means of resolving disputes. Without us, families become stuck in the revolving door of the family court trying to remedy their conflict not dissimilar to the ER being utilized as a primary care facility.

In Children's Law Center's cases,

- 100% are identified as high conflict
- 100% include a significant risk posed to the child or children
- 66% have past or ongoing DCF services with whom we work collaboratively
- 85% percent of our cases end in agreement avoiding multi-day trials
- 99% percent of our recommendations to the Court are incorporated into the Court's orders
- 87% of cases handled by CLC remain closed and do not return to court for further litigation

- We continue to monitor the family after judgment to quell any disputes that may arise so the family can avoid returning to court
- Our free Children's Law Line helps people navigate the legal system in a more efficient manner
- Our family mediation program provides a viable alternative to returning to court, alleviating the burden on the court and court services.

We are currently reformatting our outcomes into the Results Based Accountability format. We will submit this hard data to you upon its completion.

We respectfully request that our funding be restored and re-classified as a line item in the budget of the Office of the Chief Public Defender. The OCPD is the agency with whom we contract to perform these services and who oversees the quality of the services we provide.

We appreciate your recognition of the contributions we make to Connecticut, and ask that you continue to support us and renew our contract.

Thank you.